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## NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS: A Personal Narrative. By Robert Lansing. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

The sub-title, "a personal narrative," truly characterizes Mr. Lansing's book. For no matter with what reluctance the distinguished author adopts the first person singular in telling his story, no matter how scrupulous his sense of propriety and of justice, no matter how impersonal his logic, the personal feeling is there, and it is this which explains the book and lends it unique interest. One does not mean to imply, in the least, that Mr. Lansing has written in pique. His motives, on any reckoning, are irreproachable. Feeling that his loyalty has been doubted, or in some manner called in question, he frankly writes in self-justification. His book is a sort of *De Corona*, without the crown—for no crowns were won at the Peace Conference. But the reaction upon one of Mr. Lansing's character and mental equipment of the feeling that he had been unfairly judged and thrust into a false and unfavorable position was inevitably—not to provoke spleen or any other unworthy emotion—but to intensify logic, to render analysis ruthless, to make of fairness and logic a crushing weapon.

Beware of the large-minded and fair-spirited man who turns at bay! Perhaps nothing that has been written about Woodrow Wilson in the heat of political controversy is half so scathing as this book of Mr. Lansing's. That it was *meant* to be scathing, is a conviction hard to resist. Certainly, if understatement may be taken as a token of irony, and if a refinement of fairness in the exposure of weaknesses may be regarded as a sign of (no doubt, justifiable) bitterness, one must come to the conclusion that few sharper indictments have ever been brought against any public man than Mr. Lansing has virtually brought against Woodrow Wilson. No "high crimes and misdemeanors" are mentioned—such things are, of course, not at all in question. But the portrait that is incidentally, and, as it were, unintentionally drawn—the portrait of a man enigmatic, inconsistent, a sort of *enfant terrible* among statesmen, a man of incalculable abilities, unfathomable wrong-headedness—this is a terrible and almost a pitiable thing.

Thus, the fact that Mr. Lansing has given, as one would expect, a remarkably clear and statesmanlike exposition of the principal issues at stake in the Peace Conference—an exposition which historians cannot ignore—sinks, for the present, into relative insignificance beside the personal aspect of the book. What is borne in upon one overwhelmingly, just now, is the conviction that nothing more damaging to the ultimate reputation of Woodrow Wilson as

one of the world's great men could possibly have been written. On the whole, one does not believe, after all, that this effect was consciously conceived; there is too great an element in it of the inevitable, the impersonal, of what is called poetic justice. But the book is, above all, a formidable book—formidable because it is honest, able, wholly natural in feeling, and because for all these reasons it will be believed.

The narrative is personal in a sort of double sense. Not merely is it Mr. Lansing's rendering of his individual account, but also it is—and by its very nature it could not be otherwise—a continuous criticism of the former President. Everywhere one encounters this enigmatic personality. The facts are all given, the reasons *pro* and *con* are all set forth, possible differences of opinion are allowed for. But what in every case was the cause which explained the action finally taken? One is left invariably to speculate upon *Mr. Wilson's motives*.

The President's determination to be present at the Peace Conference, in spite of what was, according to Mr. Lansing, the obvious unwisdom of such a course, is to be explained only on the assumption that "the idea had become so firmly embedded in his mind that nothing could dislodge it or divert him from his purpose." Still, when he announced that he would become the head of the American Commission, he seems to have done so with grave doubts as to the prudence of his decision. "This delay in reaching a final determination was characteristic of Mr. Wilson. There is in his mentality a strange mixture of positiveness and indecision which is almost paradoxical. . . . Suddenness rather than promptness has always marked his decisions." Curiously inconsistent as he was, for example, in maintaining the doctrine of "self-determination" as against the old "balance of power," while his Covenant in effect set up an oligarchy of Great Powers, he seized with avidity upon phrases which effected a purely verbal reconciliation between opposite principles. Thus he eagerly accepted the clever formula of General Smuts, that the League of Nations was to acquire the mandated territories as "the heir of the Empires." Close analysis of the meaning of such formulae made him impatient. Questions like, "Where does the sovereignty over these [mandated] territories reside?" he dismissed as "legal technicalities." The impression one receives is that Mr. Wilson was generally intolerant of anything that hampered the free and somewhat mysterious workings of his own mind. The tentative draught of the treaty which the American experts were preparing had to be abandoned because Mr. Wilson told Mr. Lansing that he did not intend that the treaty should be made by lawyers. The American Commissioners, Mr. Lansing complains, were without definite guidance, because no clearly worked-out scheme was in their possession: the only scheme appears to have been that which more or less gradually took shape in the President's own mind.

A certain intemperateness in political controversy has been attributed to Mr. Wilson; "he has been blamed for not having sought more constantly to placate the opponents of the Covenant and to meet them on a common

ground of compromise." But such criticisms, thinks Mr. Lansing, are hardly to be maintained. The intemperance was on the other side! "When one considers the personal animus shown and the insolent tone adopted by his critics, his conduct was very human; not wise, but human."

More than once Mr. Lansing defends his former chief in some such fashion as this; but it is to be feared that in this case the attribution of entire normality as regards the feeling element serves finally but to emphasize a certain want of what is ordinarily considered normality of judgment: Mr. Wilson was "*not wise, but human.*"

To resume the imperfect reproduction of what is in effect Lansing's character sketch of Wilson: the latter's inability to receive advice is strongly emphasized. It is true that the President changed his mind in regard to certain provisions about international arbitration which had formed part of his original draught of the Covenant—provisions to which Mr. Lansing had objected upon what seem entirely just and definite grounds. But concerning other clauses, equally objectionable from Mr. Lansing's point of view, he remained obstinate. "I failed entirely," writes the ex-Secretary of State, "in my endeavor to divert the President from his determination to have these provisions inserted in the Covenant, except in the case of international arbitrations, and even in that case I do not believe that my advice had anything to do with his abandonment of his ideas as to the method of selecting arbitrators and the right of appeal from arbitral awards. Those changes and the substitution of an article providing for the future creation of a Permanent Court of International Justice, were, in my opinion, a concession to the European statesmen and due to their insistence."

It would be difficult to characterize a man more plainly by a mere statement of facts and of opinion concerning the facts.

Significant, too, in the same light, is the author's statement regarding the perfunctory nature of the President's conferences with the American Commissioners. "There was none of the frankness that should have existed between the Chief Executive and his chosen agents and advisers. The impression made was that he summoned the conferences to satisfy the *amour propre* of the Commissioners rather than out of any personal wish to do so. The consequence was that the American Commissioners, other than Colonel House, were kept in almost complete ignorance of the preliminary negotiations and were left to gather such information as they were able from the delegates of other powers, who, naturally assuming that the Americans possessed the full confidence of the President, spoke with much freedom."

Then there was the glaring inconsistency of the Shantung award—in which an opportunist policy was followed, Mr. Lansing implies, without the justification, such as it is, of real expediency. For it is Mr. Lansing's opinion that in the event of an adverse decision the Japanese would not have made good their threat of refusing to accept the treaty and to enter the League of Nations. The responsibility lay with the President. "If he had declined to recognize

the Japanese claims, they would never have been granted. Everything goes to show that he realized this responsibility, and that the cession to Japan was not made through error or misconception of the rights of the parties, but was done deliberately and with full appreciation that China was being denied that which in other circumstances would have been awarded to her. If it had not been for reasons wholly independent and outside of the question in dispute, the President would not have decided as he did."

Taking all together the main points of the characterization, as it may be called, with the minor facts that fit in with them, one finds presented the striking portrait of a man curiously unaccountable; at once obstinate and variable; one-idea-ed and yet inconsistent, great in his way, but impossible. There is a reserve, a bareness, and a definiteness about the portrayal which stamps it upon the reader's mind.

The book is not an easy one to estimate justly in the fashion of the reviewer. One does not wish to beg the whole question, if there be a question, about Mr. Wilson's mentality or motives. No more does one wish to attribute to Mr. Lansing an animus which he does not own. But one must be true to the fact, or at least to the personal impression, that the book is, in effect, a powerful destructive analysis not only of policies but of character—a fact in which lies its commanding interest. The narrative is a kind of "acid test"; in this sense, and in this sense only, it is biting; for it contains not a word of denunciation or of satire.

A little strangely, after all, one finds one's opinion of Mr. Wilson as a remarkable, perhaps one might say a great, personality by no means obliterated by Mr. Lansing's sober and moderate, if often condemnatory record. It is true that this record does, if accepted as final, shatter the image of Mr. Wilson as a great international statesman. Hammer strokes on porcelain could hardly be more effective. But the figure of whatever was really great in the character or influence of Mr. Wilson as he was in Paris does not seem to be needlessly marred. One is prompted to reflect that in this modern world it is excessively difficult to be a great public man and at the same time an original thinker, an idealist, something of a genius. Human nature ill endures the strain of these inner compulsions and outer requirements. And it may be suggested by way of comparison that few of the foreign statesmen who participated in the Peace Conference rose in our estimation by virtue of anything done there. Mr. Lansing's story confirms one's impression that the whole procedure of Mr. Wilson, from the time when he decided to go as head of the American Commission to Paris, was strangely flawed. The Wilsonian policies, moreover, have been rejected by a majority of the American people. Yet now it is clear that a certain broad charity of judgment follows the ex-President into his retirement. Who knows that in circumstances in any way analogous to those which surrounded Mr. Wilson in Paris he himself would be secure from "the o'er growth of some complexion, oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason." Mr. Lansing's narrative, though written in an "I can no

other" mood that scarcely admits of the softening or blurring of facts, does not exclude, and is obviously not intended to exclude, such broadly just and charitable judgment as the reader may feel disposed to accord.

Of the book it may be said finally, that it is one of those publications which without being in method or motive "sensational" may justly cause a sensation. Seldom do such circumstances work upon such a man to produce a work at once so human and so impersonal—a chapter of world history and of private history, refrigerated as it were, by the suppression of personal feeling, and so cold that it burns into the mind as liquid air, seven times colder than ice, burns into the flesh.

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THE DAYS BEFORE YESTERDAY. By Lord Frederic Hamilton. New York: George H. Doran Company.

A master of the gentle art of digression—so much a master, indeed, that he seems, as few modern writers are able to seem—to be the victim of it, Lord Frederic Hamilton wanders on in the most charming, aimless fashion through pages of the most delightful reminiscence. In it all, there is nothing of awesome importance: it is just an old man's talk about his youth—but what a picture it paints!

Charm cannot arise out of variety alone nor solely from the mellowness which time gives to the backward view. There must be a social setting, and it is the mid-Victorian setting that lends the charm to Lord Frederic's book. The narrative takes us straight back to the time when no one spoke of a hotel but everyone used the word "inn," now confined to historical novels and jocular references; when young men refrained from smoking before going to a ball, in order to avoid offending their partners; when young people did not spill cigarette ashes over everything; when "the possibility of appearing in Piccadilly in anything but a high hat and a tail coat was unthinkable, as was the idea of sitting down to dinner in anything but a white tie."

In referring to these good old times, the author proves himself, certainly, a very moderate *laudator temporis acti*. Heavy drinking, for example, was more common, he admits, in those days, than now—though it is (curiously enough) to the *cigarette* rather than to superior virtue that the temperate habits of the twentieth century are due! Nor does he in any way bore his readers with comparisons between the old and the new. Nevertheless, he holds a brief for the Victorian period. Granting that the differences between different types of social life are largely sentimental, still sentiments are everything, for they include our ideals. And Victorian ideals are not to be surrendered without loss. "To my mind," writes the author, "they embody all that is clean and sound in the nation. It does not follow that because Victorians revelled in hideous wall-papers and loved ugly furniture, that therefore their points of view were mistaken ones." The reason for emphasizing this attitude of the author's at the expense of failing to point out the many charm-